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Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the seventieth session

Observer status for the Indian Ocean Rim Association in the General Assembly

Letter dated 6 August 2015 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia addressed to the Secretary-General

Pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I, as Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the seventieth session of the Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Observer status for the Indian Ocean Rim Association in the General Assembly".

The Association is an intergovernmental organization consisting of 20 littoral and island States around the Indian Ocean.

The Association wishes to apply for observer status with the General Assembly to extend and formalize ties with the United Nations, thus enabling greater interaction and collaboration with the United Nations on shared matters of interest.

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I attach an explanatory memorandum (annex I) and a draft resolution (annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Julie **Bishop**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

1. The Indian Ocean Rim Association fulfils the legal criteria for permanent observer status in the General Assembly

In its decision 49/426, adopted without a vote, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Sixth Committee and taking note of the oral report presented to the Sixth Committee on 25 November 1994 by the Chair of the Working Group on the question of criteria for granting observer status in the Assembly, decided that the granting of observer status in the Assembly should in future be confined to States and to those intergovernmental organizations whose activities cover matters of interest to the Assembly.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association is an independent intergovernmental organization established in March 1997 by the agreement establishing the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation[1] (IORA Charter). The organization has its headquarters in Ebène, Mauritius.

Created as a vehicle for fostering economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, the Association has evolved into the peak regional grouping to span the Indian Ocean. The objectives of the Association — enshrined in the Charter — are:

(a) To promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of the Member States, and to create common ground for regional economic cooperation;

(b) To focus on those areas of economic cooperation which provide maximum opportunities to develop shared interests and reap mutual benefits. Towards this end, to formulate and implement projects for economic cooperation relating to trade facilitation and liberalization, promotion of foreign investment, scientific and technological exchanges, tourism, movement of natural persons and service providers on a non-discriminatory basis; and the development of infrastructure and human resources, inter alia, poverty alleviation, promotion of maritime transport and related matters, cooperation in the fields of fisheries trade, research and management, aquaculture, education and training, energy, information technology, health, protection of the environment, agriculture, and disaster management;

(c) To seek to invigorate the Association by advancing the prioritized agenda decided upon at the meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Bengaluru, India, in November 2011. That meeting gave a focused direction to the formulation of a dynamic road map of cooperation, in consonance with the growing global emphasis on the unique geo-strategic primacy of the Indian Ocean rim. The priority areas are (i) maritime safety and security; (ii) trade and investment facilitation; (iii) fisheries management; (iv) disaster risk management; (v) academic and science and technology cooperation; and (vi) tourism and cultural exchanges;

[1] The organization's name was formally changed from the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 2014. This name change was confirmed by agreement to a revised Charter adopted on 9 October 2014 at the 13th meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

(d) To explore all possibilities and avenues for trade liberalization, to remove impediments and lower barriers to freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment and technology within the region;

(e) To encourage close interaction of trade and industry, academic institutions, scholars and the peoples of the member States without any discrimination among member States and without prejudice to obligations under other regional economic and trade cooperation arrangements;

(f) To strengthen cooperation and dialogue among member States in international forums on global economic issues, and where desirable to develop shared strategies and take common positions in the international forums on issues of mutual interest;

(g) To promote cooperation in the development of human resources, particularly through closer linkages among training institutions, universities and other specialized institutions of the member States.

2. Membership

From its inception in 1997 with 14 member States, the Association's membership has expanded to 20 countries: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.

The Association has six dialogue partners. China, Egypt, France, Japan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

The Association has two observers: the Indian Ocean Tourism Organisation and the Indian Ocean Research Group.

The organization is financed by annual contributions from its member States, together with funding by member States for the Special Fund, which supports specific projects and programmes adopted by the Association. Member States in addition provide in-kind support for various activities, such as hosting conferences, meetings and workshops, undertaking research, feasibility studies and assessments, and enabling networking opportunities and cooperation among member States within specific sectors.

3. Institutions and structure

The Association is composed of a Secretariat, a Council of Ministers, a Committee of Senior Officials, four working groups and two specialized agencies.

The ultimate decision-making body of the organization is the Council of Ministers, a forum in which Foreign Ministers meet annually to advance areas of regional cooperation. The Council of Ministers forms policy, reviews progress, agrees new areas for cooperation, establishes additional mechanisms or specialized agencies as necessary, and makes decisions on other matters of shared interest. The Council of Ministers elects a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Association for a period of two years respectively. The Council of Ministers is the sole body within the Association with the power to decide on applications for membership of the organization.

The Committee of Senior Officials, a group of senior government officials of member States, meets twice a year to decide on the Association's work programme and to further implementation of decisions taken at the Council of Ministers. The Committee of Senior Officials, with the four working groups, establishes the priorities for economic cooperation, develops, monitors and coordinates the programmes of work, mobilizes funding to finance programmes of work, submits periodic reports to the Council of Ministers, and refers policy matters requiring decisions to the Council of Ministers.

The Secretariat is the executive organ of the organization and is responsible for carrying out the Association's programme of work from day to day. It is headed by a Secretary-General, who is appointed by the Council of Ministers. The Secretary-General is assisted by up to four directors and supporting staff. The Secretariat is based in Ebène, Mauritius, and operates in English.

The Association comprises four working groups: the Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum, the Working Group on Trade and Investment, the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group, and the Working Group of Heads of Mission. These groups, coordinated by the Secretariat, carry out the activities underpinning the Association's programme of work. The working groups report to the Committee of Senior Officials.

The Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum was established to encourage the participation of the private sector in advancing the agenda for economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, in particular by bringing together representatives from business and the chambers of commerce of Member States. This forum facilitates closer interaction between the business, government and academic sectors.

The purpose of the Working Group on Trade and Investment is to improve regional cooperation on trade and investment facilitation, including through the development of workshops and sharing of best practice.

The Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group was established to further intellectual dialogue between participating member States, to serve as a vehicle for promoting Indian Ocean regionalism, and to provide coordinated research on the Indian Ocean region.

The Working Group of Heads of Mission consists of the heads of diplomatic missions of the Association's member States based in Pretoria. The Working Group meets annually and acts as a follow-up mechanism on issues directly referred by the Committee of Senior Officials and the Council of Ministers. The purpose of this group is to allow the Association's member States to meet intersessionally between other formal meetings. There is no specific sectoral focus for this group.

The Association has two specialized agencies, the Fisheries Support Unit and the Regional Centre for Science and Transfer of Technology. The Fisheries Support Unit is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, and aims to improve regional cooperation on fisheries-related activities through more effective networking and coordination among member States. The Regional Centre for Science and Transfer of Technology is hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and aims to assist Member States to acquire, disseminate and promote technologies, undertake research, policy review and analysis, facilitate networking and partnerships with international organizations and other key stakeholders and encourage the establishment of technology hubs to jointly advance technology development.

4. Mutual advantages of the Association being granted observer status in the General Assembly

The various activities of the organization advance in a practical manner many of the objectives and purposes of the United Nations, with a particular focus on those that relate to sustainable economic growth — including trade and investment, the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, maritime security, safety — including disaster risk management, food security — particularly around fisheries management, and gender equality.

While these focal areas affirm and further key priorities of the United Nations, they are also central to the post-2015 development agenda. The Association's work aligns strongly with a number of the proposed sustainable development goals to be discussed ahead of the seventieth session of the General Assembly — not least those associated with sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the sustainable use of the oceans and gender equality.

The Association has an important role to play in ensuring the security, prosperity and stability of the Indian Ocean region. As the only ministerial-level forum to span the Indian Ocean, the Association is in a strong position to convey and promote the positions of the Indian Ocean region in international forums, while also shaping the region's response to the post-2015 agenda and the broader concerns of the General Assembly.

The Indian Ocean region is important for the United Nations. The Association's role in coordinating and implementing regional responses to United Nations priorities is significant. Indian Ocean rim countries are home to more than 30 per cent of the world's population — about 2 billion people. The Indian Ocean region includes some of the fastest growing economies, driven by large and youthful populations, and huge reserves of natural resources. The world relies on the sea lines of communication that cross the Indian Ocean.

In its programme of work for coming years, the Association remains focused on furthering regional economic cooperation among member States and ensuring that the challenges faced by the countries of the Indian Ocean rim are sufficiently considered in international discourse.

For these reasons, an increased exchange with the General Assembly would be mutually beneficial.

Numerous United Nations agencies and bodies — including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme — have participated in the activities of the Association. We also envisage opportunities for cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Maritime Organization, the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, and the World Tourism Organization.

In view of the degree of cooperation that already exists between the Association and the United Nations agencies and bodies, and taking into account the Association's broad mandate in the Indian Ocean region, observer status in the General Assembly would both consolidate links between the United Nations and the Association, and facilitate opportunities for greater mutually beneficial cooperation in the future.

Annex II

Draft resolution

Observer status for the Indian Ocean Rim Association in the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Wishing to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the Indian Ocean Rim Association,

1. *Decides* to invite the Indian Ocean Rim Association to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the action necessary to implement the present resolution.